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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001559

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TAGS: PREL EAID EFIN PTER BA LE IS REGION POL  
SUBJECT: BAHRAINIS RAISE FUNDS FOR LEBANON; HIZBALLAH  
SYMBOLS REMAIN VISIBLE

REF: A. MANAMA 1550  
1B. MANAMA 1513  
1C. MANAMA 1473  
1D. MANAMA 1458 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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11. (C) Bahrain's media have been filled with stories about efforts to deliver financial and material assistance to the Lebanese people in the aftermath of implementation of the cessation of hostilities. The government has donated \$5 million to the local Lebanon Fund and \$1 million to UNICEF. The Fund has also raised \$1.1 million from a telethon and \$1.35 million (out of a target of \$2.65 million) through the sale of "donation coupons." A delegation composed of representatives from seven political societies visited Syria and, following implementation of the ceasefire, Lebanon, and met with President Lahoud, PM Siniora, Hizballah MPs, and other prominent politicians. A member of the delegation said the group offered political support, but no financial or material assistance, to the Lebanese. For the time being, Bahraini authorities are tolerating public pro-Hizballah displays, but contacts have commented that these displays will gradually go away over the next few weeks. Columnists continue to celebrate Hizballah's "victory" and cite the perceived irony of U.S. cooperation with Shia in Iraq while Israel battles Shia in Lebanon. End Summary.

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Government Contributes \$5 Million to Lebanon Fund  
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12. (C) The Bahraini press is running many stories about official and non-official Bahraini assistance for Lebanon, with coverage of government donations getting banner headlines. Although there has been no official announcement, articles refer to a government contribution of \$5 million to the "Lebanon Fund" run by the High Committee in Aid of the Lebanese People, composed of the Bahrain Red Crescent Society and representatives of charity organizations. MFA Assistant Under Secretary for Coordination and Follow Up Shaikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa told the Charge August 19 that the money has been earmarked but not yet delivered.

13. (C) Committee vice chair Sadiq Al Shehabi told Pol/Econ Chief August 23 that all Fund resources were "gifts from the people of Bahrain to the people of Lebanon," and should not be considered as official assistance. He said the goods brought to Lebanon thus far were delivered in coordination with the UN, Lebanese Red Cross, and the recently formed Lebanese High Committee for Assistance. He admitted that it

was difficult to provide complete oversight and monitoring of the Bahraini donations to Lebanon, but he had confidence that his partner institutions were able to ensure that the assistance would reach needy people. Saying several times that Red Cross/Red Crescent organizations should be apolitical, he indicated that representatives from several Middle Eastern chapters, including Israel's and Bahrain's, had met recently to discuss the distribution of aid to Lebanon.

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Other Activities Raise Additional \$2.5 Million So Far  
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¶4. (C) The High Committee also raised \$1.1 million during the August 7 telethon conducted in coordination with the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (Note: Al Shehabi mentioned, however, that many of those who had pledged donations during the telethon, in particular businesses, had not yet delivered the money.) The government has organized the sale of one million "donation coupons" costing BD 1 (\$2.65) each to raise money for the Lebanon Fund. The coupons are sold at government offices and public sector employees were urged to purchase the coupons. According to Al Shehabi, BD 510,000 (\$1.35 million) has already been raised via this appeal. A local car dealership donated a Mercedes sedan for a BD 30,000 (\$80,000) raffle in support of the Committee's fundraising.

¶5. (C) The government announced August 16 that it would donate \$1 million to UNICEF. Shaikh Abdul Aziz told the Charge that this contribution comes in direct response to a Lebanese government request to all GCC countries. He said the Lebanese target for GCC-wide contributions is \$25-30 million, with each country donating in proportion to its GDP. Shaikh

Abdul Aziz said the \$1 million meets Bahrain's percentage of the total figure.

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In-Kind Contributions Moving to Lebanon  
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¶6. (C) Al Shehabi told P/E Chief that the Committee had sent three shipments of goods totaling 26 tons via airplane to Damascus for onward transport to Lebanon. Gulf Air has pledged to deliver a total of 40 tons of goods free of charge. Gulf Air will fly directly to Beirut as soon as the airport is fully reopened. Al Shehabi said the Committee had planned to use trucks to ship much of the goods, but this had proven to be too difficult logistically. He said that all of the goods delivered to Lebanon so far had been donated to, not purchased by, the Committee, with the exception of \$600,000 in medications to treat chronic diseases that the Committee had purchased from the Ministry of Health.

¶7. (C) Al Shehabi said the Committee would now focus its efforts on sending aid in cash rather than in kind because Lebanon has enough food items and other relief materials for the coming two months. The Committee has spent very little of the funds it has raised, and plans to use its financial resources to fund the construction of schools, health clinics, and other needed facilities in Lebanon. He stated publicly on August 21 that the Committee would "wait for the Lebanese authorities to send us a copy of their master plan for rebuilding the country before we start sending aid in cash."

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Recipients of Informal Fundraising Unknown  
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¶8. (C) On weekends, youth waving Hizballah flags and holding money boxes solicit donations from motorists and pedestrians. There are similar scenes at shopping malls, mosques, and matams (Shia religious community centers). Our contacts have said they do not know which organizations these young people represent. Leading Shia opposition society Al Wifaq foreign

affairs director Saeed Al Majed told Pol/Econ Chief August 22 that they were not associated with his organization. He guessed that they were from a Shia charity group. Al Shehabi emphasized that all fundraising efforts in Bahrain should be unified under the High Committee. He complained there were no controls over the "random" efforts, and commented that those holding the collection boxes could be putting the money into their own pockets or using the funds for activities unrelated to Lebanon.

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Delegation to Lebanon Offers Political Support  
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¶19. (C) As reported Ref B, the press closely followed the activities of a delegation representing seven local political societies to Syria and Lebanon. Al Majed told P/E Chief that the group met with Lebanese President Lahoud, PM Siniora, and a representative of parliamentary speaker Berri, in addition to Hizballah MPs and other political figures. The Lebanese expressed their appreciation for Bahrain's support. Al Majed said that all Lebanese he met, officials and citizens alike, supported Hizballah's defense of Lebanon. He reported that in response to the delegation's question, Hizballah MPs said that disarmament "is an issue to be discussed by Hizballah and the Lebanese government only." He said the group did not meet with Hizballah representatives other than the MPs.

¶10. (C) Al Majed told P/E Chief that he felt it was important to state publicly prior to the delegation's departure for Lebanon that they would carry no financial or material assistance, and would only offer political support to the Lebanese. He noted that a representative from political society Al Waad had told the press that the delegation would carry funds to Lebanon, but this was not true (Refs A and C). Al Majed stressed that Al Wifaq was fully committed to complying with all Bahraini laws and does not want any problems with the government. When Al Wifaq members ask about donating money, Al Majed said that he and his colleagues refer them to the High Committee or other established charities.

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Hizballah Flags Visible, For Now  
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¶11. (C) For the time being, the Bahraini government tolerates public manifestations of support for Hizballah. In a particularly provocative display, a Shia mosque and matam directly across the street from the Ministry of Interior compound are each flying yellow Hizballah flags from multiple staffs jutting from their roofs. Contacts have commented that they expect the GOB to allow these public displays for now, but that the flags, photos, and other items will go away gradually over the next few weeks. (Comment: This expectation is based upon past experience. However, Bahraini Shias' identification with a perceived ascendant Hizballah could result in the displays lingering longer than usual.)

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Columnists' Venting Continues  
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¶12. (U) The Lebanon conflict and its repercussions remains a daily subject of editorialists and columnists. Fawziya Rasheed from Akhbar Al Khaleej writes on August 22 that Hizballah defeated Israel "strategically and historically." All Israelis, she claims, are trying to figure out how the defeat happened. Hizballah "has strong faith in its cause, was well prepared militarily, and is credible to all Arabs and Muslims despite any sectarian differences." She says these factors ensure that "Hizballah wins every time and this can be a good lesson for all resistance fighters in the Arab world." Akhbar Al Khaleej editor-in-chief Anwar Abdul Rahman writes August 19 that America and Israel should learn that no occupation on earth can last forever and that Israel must "give back the rights of the Palestinians" that it has

confiscated for decades.

¶13. (U) Hafedh Al Shaikh, also from Akhbar Al Khaleej, writes on August 22 that there is a "catastrophic irony" that Shias in Lebanon are fighting Israel and America while getting support from Iran. Whereas in Iraq, "Shias welcome and collaborate with the American occupier for the sake of their sectarian plan that is blessed by Sistani and Al Hakim." Also referring to Iran's conspiracies in the region, Al Shaikh writes on August 19 that "the victory of Hizballah must not blind us from seeing the fact that we live in the middle of two Imperialisms: the American/Zionist Imperialism and the regional Safawi (Iranian) Imperialism. Both forces hold historic grudges against the Arabs and will do all they can bring the region under the control of the Zionists and then draw the Shia crescent from the west coast of Iran to Basra and toward Salala in Oman."

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Comment  
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¶14. (C) In the context of active Bahraini fundraising on behalf of the Lebanese people, some contacts have spoken with alarm about the speed with which Hizballah is delivering assistance to those harmed by the conflict. High Committee official Al Shehabi's intention to review a master plan before dispatching financial assistance to Lebanon will result in Bahrain's (very modest levels of) assistance reaching Lebanon only after a substantial delay. Referring to this race to provide assistance, Al Ayam columnist Esmat Al Mousawi on August 20 criticizes the Arab reaction to Hizballah's support for reconstruction. She says, "Instead of questioning where Hizballah's funds come from, you better take the first move to donate to the reconstruction. It is much better than hiding behind closed doors in reaction to a situation that your silence allowed to happen."

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